

Glamorous Easter Island Is Really Squalid!

One Of The Most Intriguing Places In The World, For Rocking Chair Travellers, Has Been Over-rated, States Explorer



Map of Easter Island Drawn by a Member of the Expedition, Showing Location of the Rock Quarries and Rano Raraku, Which Commander Noville Explored.



(Left) Lt. Com. G. O. Noville Was in the U. S. Army's First Round-the-World Flight; Flew Across the Atlantic and Went to the North and South Poles With Admiral Byrd. (Above) Easter Island's Statues With Hats as They Appeared to Holmes, Artist on Captain Cook's Expedition. The Hats Were Subsequently Shaken Off by Earthquakes.



William Bowlin, Chief Aviation Pilot, on Antarctic Expedition; Joseph Peltier, Photographer, and the Author in Front of Some of the Images on Easter Island.



An Easter Island Canoe; from "La Perouse's Voyage."



Taraki, the Native Guide, Is Shown Wearing a Topcoat, Shirt and Tie Which Were Given to Him for His Services as a Guide. Noville and Walter Lewisom Are on the Right.

No Beautiful Lilies Or Little White Bunnies On Easter Island — Nothing But Ramshackle Huts Of Driftwood

By Lieutenant Commander G. O. Noville
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EASTER ISLAND — the name brings forth visions of little white bunnies and varicolored eggs, beautiful white lilies and boisterous games. Actually however, the bare mention of the name Easter Island, to one acquainted with this desolate, mysterious, isolated foundling of the South Seas brings up a different picture. Squallid ramshackle huts built of driftwood and odds and ends. Low barren hills covered with scrub, from which flocks of half-wild sheep eke a barely sufficient existence. Smashing mountains of water, breaking and pounding on the rock buttressed shores. To the south westward a group of sinister rigid figures carved from basaltic rock staring with sightless eyes and grim sardonic faces toward the Antipodes. High on a hillside and surrounded by wire stockades are two European houses, the abode of the four white persons who spend the weary years searching the horizon for welcoming smudges of smoke or triangle of sail that herald the approach of an incoming ship. Along the beaches and lolling indolently in the sunlight are the 228 inhabitants. Brown-skinned amazons in mother Hubbard's, scrambling pickaninnies not yet graduated from the nudist school and lazy, sly Polynesian tribesmen dressed in anything and everything that bares any resemblance to clothing.

Located in the South Pacific at approximately Longitude 110° W and Latitude 29°, Easter Island lies 2000 miles off the coast of Chile and 1100 miles southeast of Pitcairn Island. Contrary to general belief it is even more isolated than Pitcairn. It has been the object of several British, French and American Research Expeditions, bent on solving the mystery of the great carved images and the mystery surrounding the inhabitants.

The second Byrd Antarctic Expedition arrived off the coast of Easter Island on November 15, 1933, on its way to the Antarctic. The flagship of the Expedition, the *S. S. Jacob Ruppert*, was forced to lay off the island about two miles, due to uncertain weather and a forbidding coast. The record of ships wrecked in the vicinity and on the island was imposing and every precaution possible was taken. Although anchored two miles off the landing, a full head of steam was carried in order to make it possible to get under weigh at a moment's notice. Later developments proved this a wise precaution.

DMIRAL BYRD took charge of one boat and assigned me to the other. We armed with revolvers and knives, carefully hidden, placed some trade goods in the boats and followed in the wake of the native boats. It was a long, hard pull into the landing at the base of Rano Raraku, where the entire population seemed to have gathered. Standing apart from the crowding, milling natives was a figure neatly clothed in riding breeches and boots and a weather-worn felt hat. After a few moments he strolled over to our group. The natives made a lane for him and the hubbub ceased. He approached Admiral Byrd and in well modulated, perfect English, he said, "Good afternoon gentlemen. I am Governor Hillyard. Is there anything I can do for you?" The Admiral looked sharply at the pseudo-native governor who showed no sign of embarrassment and answered the sharp look with a wide grin.

After introducing ourselves we accompanied

the governor, on small native ponies placed at our disposal, to one of the small European houses inside the wire stockade and perched on the slope of Rano Raraku. We were graciously received by the governor's lady, who invited us to tea. Over the teacups we were regaled with the tragic history and misery of the island.

Discovered in 1722 by Roggeween, a Dutch sea captain, the island was later visited by such adventurous spirits as Captain Cook, La Perouse and Gonzalez. They found the island inhabited by a tribe of Polynesians, superior in culture and physique to the inhabitants of the more northern islands. They reported that the natives were friendly and although there were legends of cannibalism, no physical evidence of this fact was available. They found the island valueless and non-productive of wealth and consequently no claim of sovereignty was exercised. After La Perouse, the island was visited by American whalers who kidnapped such of the natives as looked exceptionally fit, for the grueling cruises into whale-infested Antarctic seas. Later on Chilean ships took off the island over a thousand of the natives, practically a third of its population and delivered them into virtual slavery in the guano fields of Chile. Among these were the maoris, or savants, of the island culture and many of the arigi, the great chiefs. Years later the remnants of this forced exodus were returned to Easter Island, a pitifully small group of 15 emaciated, disease laden skeletons. They brought back with them one of the scourges of civilization — smallpox. An epidemic of this dreaded disease swept the island and when it had run its course less than a 1000 inhabitants were left. The cruelty and privations imposed on the natives by the white man changed the entire nature of the remainder of this once powerful and happy tribe. They became sullen, moody and depressed. Under the merciless treatment of the whites they degenerated. They were imbued with a homicidal mania, their simple pastimes became murder, mayhem, robbery and arson.

THE proud history of the image builders was ended. The white man had brought them clothes, morals, axioms, disease and firearms. Their women had been violated and many were conscious of their close relationship to the scum of the seven seas. Today, evidences of intermingling may be seen in the blue-eyed blonde-haired offspring, a hybrid produced by the best of native tradition and the worst of the Caucasian. The island mystery, the stone images,

are as much of a mystery to the present generation of natives as they are to the white man. No legend or sage has been handed down from generation to generation. The fine, upstanding Easter Island Polynesian of Roggeween has been lost entirely. Cleanliness is unknown to this slowly disappearing mongrel tribe. Filth and laziness and an absolute disregard of property rights are their outstanding characteristics. Stealing is not a crime but an achievement.

After two hours at the Governor's house we were disturbed by a report that the sea was rising and that the recall signal for the boats was sounding. When we arrived where the boats were beached, the breakers were pounding menacingly on the rocky shore line. After several attempts to launch the boats, we gave up. The Admiral, however, decided to risk running the breakers with a native boat and crew. Launching their light craft was a feat of excellent seamanship. The breakers ran so high that again and again the boat would disappear from sight. Eventually they made the *Ruppert*, and Admiral Byrd boarded her over the Jacob's ladder. A few minutes after his arrival, the ship signaled that they were putting out to sea and would return for us when they had ridden out the storm.

Seventeen of us were left in a very uncomfortable position. These natives were temperamental. Numerous stories of the murder and massacre of white men left us in no pleasant frame of mind. Already some of their unfriendly traits were in evidence. We found that fountain pens, pencils, field glasses, hats, handkerchiefs, pocket knives, had mysteriously disappeared from our persons. These people were evidently accomplished pickpockets and thieves. Our greatest blow came when we discovered that they had stolen all the food, fishing lines and loose gear out of the boats. They had even stolen the plug out of the fresh-water breaker and allowed the water to drain into the bottom of the boat. Oar locks had been cut loose, and unquestionably the boats themselves would have disappeared except for the fact that they weighed approximately 1800 pounds each.

We were stranded on any unfriendly shore—no food and no water. The acquisitive nature of the natives was an ally. We traded articles of clothing for fresh water, corn (the only island-raised vegetable) and chickens. We borrowed a native pot and cooked up an unsavory mess of chicken and corn seasoned with salt water. We knew the Governor's larder was slim, with no possibility of replenishment until the

WE RE-DISCOVERED the ruins of ancient temples and habitations first unearthed by the Routledge Expedition of 1927-28. Our excavations produced broad obsidian spearheads and tools with which the workmen produced the images, crude stone hammers and flint-like sharp-edged stone chisels. The most friendly of the natives, Taraki, we selected as guide, policeman and mentor. Taraki showed us a cave high up in the hills and told us in his jargon of beche-de-mer English, Spanish and Polynesian that this was "Eat Man Cave," and gave us a rambling story of an old Polynesian who had lived in the cave for years, existing entirely on human flesh. Taraki was thoroughly unimaginative and when we interrogated him about peculiar hieroglyphics inscribed on rocks and thin lips. Where did the long-dead artists get the model or idea from which these statues were conceived?

When Taraki was questioned regarding island foodstuffs, we discovered that practically nothing was raised by the natives. For food and provisions they depended upon the tinned goods brought once a year by the Chilean supply ship and an occasional stolen sheep from the flocks raised under concession by the British governor. Governor Hillyard was of the opinion that any change in the routine of supplying food to the natives would in all probability result in starvation. The native has no thought of the future. Vineyards and fruit trees have been torn up and chopped down for firewood. Great flocks of sea-fowl have been exterminated due to the rapacious and careless gathering of eggs. The complexities of nature and the burdens imposed by the white man's civilization ruined the child-like simplicity of the native. Ultimately tenacious social disease, leprosy and epidemic will wipe out this tag-end of a once proud, cultured warrior tribe.

As I write, the abject misery of the inhabitants of Easter Island is typified in the two little household images I have before me, emaciated, bent and misshapen with the pain of ages of unhappiness mirrored in their eyes. I wonder if the creators of these oddly carved little wooden figures were gazing into a not far-distant future as they chipped and gouged with their crude tools.

There are mysteries on Easter Island worthy of future research and investigation. Anthropologists, geologists and scientists generally find this island rich in material for study.

Very recently I decided I want another look at Easter Island—a long look.